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INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHWN/AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PRIORITY 2096  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0810  
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN PRIORITY 1003  
RUEHKG/AMEMBASSY KINGSTON PRIORITY 2786  
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO PRIORITY 1137  
RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE PRIORITY 4676  
RUEHSP/AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN PRIORITY 1838  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTO DOMINGO 002046

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SUBJECT: FERNANDEZ SHUFFLES CABINET: ALL ARE WELCOME UNDER  
BIG TENT

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Rolland W. Bullen, Reasons 1.4(b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: In a series of decrees issued August 17-20, President Fernandez shuffled his cabinet and other key government positions. New Ministers were named for Industry and Commerce, Environment, and Public Works and Communications, as well as new heads of the National Police and Navy. The new Chief of Police, Rafael Guzman Fermin, is an excellent officer with whom we have a window of opportunity for significant change. The new Environment Minister, Omar Ramirez Tejada, has been very active in implementing Dominican environmental law in accordance with CAFTA-DR. A number of positions in the Government were given to small parties and former members of the opposition. There was no clear public policy message sent by the personnel moves. Rather, by adding parties to his coalition and keeping most former ministers on as advisors, Fernandez appears to be saying that -- as he gears up for re-election in 2008 -- all welcome under the big tent. For biographic information, see para. 9. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Adhering to Dominican tradition, Fernandez timed his cabinet shuffle for August 16, the third anniversary of the start of his second (non-consecutive) term as President. In Guzman Fermin, Fernandez has chosen a Chief of Police well and favorable known to the Embassy. Promoted from the Deputy Chief position, Guzman has given repeated indications that as Chief he will embrace a highly positive reform and training agenda. In a courtesy call with the Charge, Guzman discussed plans for the immediate future to tackle the obvious problems. He will have a new special unit within the Internal Affairs solely focused on police corruption. He will address crime through quality of life issues with strict enforcement of alcohol consumption laws, traffic laws, surges of police personnel in high risk areas and movement against narcotic trafficking at the street level. The Embassy Law Enforcement Development Advisor has met on a daily basis with the Chief, and our officer's guidance is highly sought by the Chief and has been used to build the new management team and

provide focus for the Chief's plans.

13. (C) In remarks to the press, Guzman said that he will approach his office "with a firm vision of bringing peace where there is anarchy, while respecting human rights.... My principal task will be crime prevention -- a police preventative police force of street patrols.... We also propose the strengthening of the relationship between prosecutors and the police." (Note: Initial efforts to impose order out of "anarchy" include the use of the Dominican military in staffing rolling road-blocks to search for weapons and contraband, a controversial policy begun during the tenure of Santana Paez. The new Chief has spoken with the Secretary of the Armed Forces and requested that the military not engage in these activities, allowing the police to stand on their own.)

14. (SBU) Rear Admiral Julio Ventura Bayonet, the new Chief of Staff of the Navy, is a former head of the National Directorate of Drug Control (DNCD, counter-drug force). The Navy is a critical institution for U.S. interests given its role in counter-drug operations, efforts against illegal migration, and other anti-crime responsibilities. Speaking to the press, Ventura exhorted Navy personnel to "stay away from vices" such as narcotics trafficking, trade in illegal firearms, and smuggling of alcohol and other consumer products. In a courtesy call with the Charge, Ventura stated that his priority is to improve the Navy's mission readiness and effectiveness; praised U.S. assistance programs such as Enduring Friendship; and highlighted the importance of the biometrics program, implemented by DOD and the U.S. Coast Guard, in the fight against illegal migration.

15. (SBU) Omar Ramirez Tejada, the new Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, replaces Max Puig. Puig, a leader in the small Democratic Alliance Party, gained the ire of the Congress led by the President's Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) when he spoke publicly about what he claimed were plans by (unnamed) Senators to remove prime properties from the list of protected areas.

16. (SBU) Ramirez was promoted from the position of Director of Planning and Programs at the Ministry, where he had served since 2005. He has extensive experience in environmental protection and was instrumental in writing the environmental law of 2000, which was the foundation for the creation of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources. Ramirez has been a prime point of contact for USAID's environment assistance programs in the Dominican Republic, in particular the Improved Policies for Environmental Protection project. Ramirez is a strong supporter of continued cooperation with the U.S., has an extensive knowledge of the environment chapter of DR-CAFTA, and was instrumental in establishing a Policy and Trade Unit within the Ministry. In a courtesy call with the Charge, Ramirez thanked the Embassy for its continued support of the Ministry's institutional development and reminisced fondly on his Embassy-sponsored International Visitor Program trip in the mid 1990s. Ramirez pledged continued cooperation and emphasized the importance of implementation of Chapter 17 of DR-CAFTA.

17. (U) Melanio A. Paredes Pinales is the new Minister of Industry and Commerce. A former Congressman from San Cristobal Province, Paredes takes over from Francisco Javier Garcia, who will now focus exclusively on his other job -- campaign manager for President Fernandez.

18. (C) President Fernandez's personnel changes included giving a number of positions in the Government to small parties and former members of the opposition. Most notably, members of the Dominican Revolutionary (PRD) and Reformista (PRSC) Parties -- the two largest opposition parties -- were named to head small non-cabinet agencies and to several sub-cabinet positions in the Ministry of Labor and other agencies. (Note: The PRD told POLFF that their officials are automatically expelled from the party for accepting the positions.) The small parties that were added to the ruling

coalition are the National Renaissance (PRN), Quisqueyano Social Democratic (PQDC), National Unity (PUN), Christian Popular (PPC), Democratic Popular (PDP), and National Veteran and Civilian (PNVC) Parties.

#### COMMENT

¶9. (C) In a remarkable turnabout, Guzman received the explicit blessing and congratulations of Minister for Interior and Police Franklin Almeyda, who had been an obvious though undeclared enemy of the new Police Chief's predecessor, Bernardo Santana Paez. This, combined with what appears to be a healthier relationship with senior staff in the Attorney General's Office (vice his predecessor) suggests that the opportunity to fight corruption within the national police, and pursue reform of the institution, has never been greater.

¶10. (C) In a meeting with POLOFF, the PRD leadership in the Senate addressed the naming of its members to government positions, alleging that their members were being "bought off" by the PLD. Hatuey De Camps of the opposition PRSD party called Fernandez's personnel changes "a clientalistic joke," and compared Fernandez to the former President, and master of clientalism, Joaquin Balaguer. While other observers were not so blunt, many Dominicans viewed the President's personnel changes more motivated by politics than a desire to improve the performance of individual ministries (with the exception of naming Guzman as Police Chief).

Fernandez kept most former ministers on as Ministers Without Portfolio or advisors, drawing criticism that the creation of new positions violates the Austerity Law. Porfirio Rodriguez, the head of the important democracy NGO Participacion Ciudadana, described the cabinet shuffle as "having a tint of clientalism and campaign politics." The Fernandez Administration has certainly pursued some important government programs. However, if the recent personnel changes are an indication, we can expect that the more difficult reforms will be put off until after the May 2008 presidential election.

#### Biographic Information

¶11. (U) Biographic information on the new members of the Fernandez Administration follows.

Chief of National Police: Rafael Guillermo Guzman Fermin  
Promoted from position as Deputy Chief of National Police  
Degree in Civil Engineering from Technological Institute of Santo Domingo

Chief of Staff of Navy: Julio Cesar Ventura Bayonet  
Sub-Minister of Navy, 2004-2007 (second term)  
Naval Attache, Washington, DC, 2002-2003  
Sub-Minister of Navy, 1998-1999  
Inspector General of Armed Forces, 1997-1998  
Head of National Directorate of Drug Control (DNCD), 1993-1997  
Director, Center for Information and Joint Coordination (CICC, dependent office of DNCD), 1988-1993  
Graduated from Dominican Naval Academy, 1980

Minister of Environment: Omar Ramirez Tejada  
Director of Planning and Programs, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, 2005-2007  
City Councilman for Santo Domingo, 2002-2006  
Environmental Advisor to PLD Senate and Congressional Caucuses, 2004  
Director of National Parks, 1996-2000  
Recipient of a U.S. Embassy-sponsored International Visitors Program, mid-1990s  
Founder and Director of Center for Eco-Development of Samana Bay, early-1990s  
Undergraduate degree in marine biology

Minister of Industry and Commerce: Melanio A. Paredes Pinales

Director General of National Institute for Technical and Professional Training, 2004-2007  
Member of PLD transition team, 1996, 2000, 2004  
Director of Dominican Port Authority, 1999-2000  
Executive Director of Department of Airports, 1999  
Diputado for Province of San Cristobal, 1990-1994

Minister of Public Works and Communications: Victor Jose Diaz  
Rua  
Executive Director of National Institute of Potable Water and Sewers, 2004-2007  
Member of Central and Finance Committees of PLD party

(U) This report and additional information can be found on Embassy Santo Domingo's SIPRNET site,  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/>  
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